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POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN WRITING CENTERS AND PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This article speaks into the pervasive silence on the subject of faith in writing center and writing program work. Through revisiting Sharon Crowley's *Toward a Civil Discourse* and investigating silence, we encourage "*counterfudamentalist work*": work that counters fundamentalist methodology by inviting fundamentalists and believers and nonbelievers of different kinds into nonliteralist and open-minded ways of reading writing-centered experiences involving religious faith and secularism. The three authors of this article offer personal narratives about their own experience with faith in their centers/programs and use different theoretical perspectives to start a necessary dialogue on faith and religious experiences. By interweaving theoretical perspectives, research, and personal narratives involving our WPA work, this article argues that writing center/program administrators must do the same, and we hope to model the types of conversations we must bring into our centers.

As scholars and practitioners in writing programs, we work increasingly to create safer or brave spaces to discuss race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Yet discomfort involving the subject of religious faith and identity persists, perhaps because religion exists as a hotly binarizing subject in current American political conversations. Most recently, Donald Trump has invoked religion in his speeches, as have many of his conservative and liberal antecedents,, among them the liberal evangelical Christian Jimmy Carter and the conservative evangelical Christian George W. Bush. We see such religious invocations in Trump's zeal to wish the nation a "Merry Christmas" and insist that there has been a war on Christmas for decades. We also see them in his speeches to pro-life protestors, whose work has helped "tens of thousands of Americans" reach "their full, God-given potential" ("'You Love Every Child': President Trump Addresses March for Life"). And, as some of his predecessors have, Trump references religion to encourage division as opposed to community or interfaith dialogue in a highly polarized context.[1] In doing so, he attempts to position faith as part of a rhetoric of the right and to associate secularism and atheism with a rhetoric of the left. Yet this positioning belies the fact that religious believers exist across the political spectrum and ignores the many religious believers on the political left, among them Reverend William Barber or the former U.S. president Barack Obama, who would arguably appreciate more of an association between left-wing rhetoric and religious rhetoric. Perhaps in part because of the current political climate, a resonant silence on the subject of faith persists in writing center studies, a field that engages in progressive rhetoric and perhaps fears that a conversation about religion might imply conservatism. An unsettling silence about faith among believers and non-believers of different kinds pervades the field even though the broader field of rhetoric and composition has addressed faith in more robust ways[2] and even though scholars such as Frankie Condon, Harry C. Denny, Donna LeCourt, and Vershawn Ashanti Young encourage us to move past the guise of academic neutrality. Despite this work, silence on faith and identity persists even though writing centers exist as sites for imagining dialogic potential in writing program administration because the writing center director occupies a "both/and" role as a WPA (Ianetta et al.).

As writing center researchers and current or former practitioners in writing centers, we attempt to speak into this pervasive silence on the subject of faith to understand and complicate it and to transform unproductive silence into productive work for WPAs. Building on Denny's discussion of identity politics in writing centers in *Facing the Center* and on Elizabeth Vander Lei and Lauren Fitzgerald's consideration of religious faith in relation to writing programs, we focus on belief as a key feature of social identity in writing center work at both secular and religious institutions. Like Vander Lei and Fitzgerald, we believe that to "administer writing programs without acknowledging the rhetorical force of religious belief is to ignore the personal commitments that compel some students and instructors to engage in scholarly inquiry" (189). Yet we see that belief transcends personal motivation because it shapes our identities as community members who may be reluctant to communicate about differences. In the argument we offer, we attempt to resist binary thinking, revisiting and revising our understanding of Sharon Crowley's *Toward a Civil Discourse* and the dialogic impasse she describes as existing between believers and nonbelievers.[3] We do so to invite possibilities for nuanced interactions between

believers of different faiths and levels of observance and to invite possibilities for more diverse representations of faithlessness.

We structure our article with an eye toward silence on the subject of faith as a starting point past which the field of writing center studies and WPAs must move. In section one, we locate ourselves in writing center work and theorize the rhetorical silences that result between fundamentalists, liberal non-believers, and believers of different kinds, complicating these silences by recognizing their intersection with racial and sexual identity. In section two, we acknowledge the tendency that we as WPAs might feel toward academic neutrality, blurring the distinction between alliance and complicity. In section three, we define tutor and administrator talk as enacting revisionary rhetorics and imagine rhetorical possibilities within silence and dialogue. Ultimately, each of our sections encourages "*counterfundamentalist work*" (Naydan 15), meaning, in this context, not work that excludes the voices of fundamentalists as members of academic and writing-centered communities, but work that avoids the closed-mindedness of literalist reading in which fundamentalists engage. As we see it, counterfundamentalist work avoids a fundamentalist methodology because it involves open-minded and inclusive ways of reading and talking about writing-centered experiences involving religious faith and secularism in their different forms and lived experiences. By interweaving theoretical perspectives, research, and personal narratives involving our WPA work, we argue that writing center administrators must do the same. They must create conditions for writing center inhabitants to recognize that "most of the major disagreements that currently circulate in American political discourse arise from conflicts between liberal and apocalyptist approaches to argument" (Crowley 23). In turn, writing center administrators must teach consultants to facilitate meaningful interfaith dialogue through thoughtful mentoring and professional development to transcend dialogic impasses about religion of the sort that Crowley describes.

Faith and Silence at Work

In my former position as a writing center director at a major public university and in my current position as a writing program administrator at a small public college, I (Liliana, or Lila for short) have often found myself involved in unsettling moments of silence that supplant potential moments of dialogue about faith or lack thereof, an important subject for me personally because I study faith and because I am a person of faith: a Ukrainian Catholic by upbringing who is extremely critical of the Catholic Church for its oppressive rhetorics and actions. In this section, I describe silence, which Cheryl Glenn theorizes in *Unspoken*, in relation to conversations about or dialogic impasses involving religion—impasses of the sort that Crowley describes. I do so with the goal of exploring why dialogue about religion fails in our writing centers and programs. I also do so with the goal of beginning the process of imagining heretofore unrealized roles for writing center directors and WPAs at similar institutions who find themselves involved in silences that they wish were moments of productive interfaith dialogue. In other words, I do so with the goal of exploring possibilities for dialogue about faith and faithlessness.

The first story I tell is of an experience I had talking privately with a colleague when I worked as the writing center director at a major public institution. At this institution, sentiments on campus were largely secular, as secularism and atheism are so often aligned with intellectualism.[4] I was new at my institution and this colleague, who identifies as gay, was trying to show me the ropes. They are a fierce intellectual who ascribes to progressive political views that I wholly share, they are well liked, and they have a dominant personality. When they invited me to their office, it was so they could tell me privately about different colleagues, and they mentioned a certain colleague of ours who was really quite wonderful "even though she's a Christian." She's not that kind of an evangelical, the colleague with whom I was speaking explained. I must've smiled a polite smile because I was new and didn't want to make waves. I said nothing about the peculiar feeling that their proclamation left me with because I'm a Christian of a sort, too—even though I apparently pass as secular because of my politics.

The second story I tell is about a similar sort of silence that resulted in my first year working in a different job at a public college. An alumnus of color from our institution was interested in starting an online writing center, and he came to my office with the director of the Learning Center at the time, an older white woman, to talk about his ideas. As our meeting wound down, the former student wanted to make a bit of small talk, so he asked me about my research. I told him about my book project on religion in American fiction since 9/11 and he asked me if I was religious. I told him the peculiar reality of my faith and he looked interested in my answer. And then he asked me if I was writing about Muslims. I said of course, and then he noted that he identifies as a "cultural Muslim." This religious identification interested me because it spoke to my own liminal religious identity—and because I want to have conversations with believers about faith.

Even though I study faith, these conversations are hard to come by. I was about to speak—to ask him what being a cultural Muslim means to him—but the director piped up first. She said that she wasn't sure what a cultural Muslim is. And then she asked this alumnus whether he had meant to say that he was a "secular Muslim." She had heard of secular Jews and assumed that Muslims of the sort that this student was claiming himself to be must be akin to them. The student said yes. He said that one might describe his beliefs in that way. And then he quickly changed the topic away from religion. I felt uncomfortable about the exchange and no one in the room spoke about it again, so I unfortunately don't know if others felt uncomfortable about it, too. I especially worry that the cultural Muslim in the room felt uncomfortable about it.

In reflecting now on these exchanges, I see, first, that they speak to the notion that there exists a dialogic impasse not only between fundamentalist believers and liberal non-believers, as Crowley suggests, but between believers of non-fundamentalist varieties and between non-believers and believers of different kinds. Second, both of these exchanges show that faith and faithlessness exist in *intersection* with other features of social identity such as sexuality and race, and so these intersections inform in profound ways the dialogic impasses that manifest in conversation. Third, both of these exchanges reveal that faith exists often as invisible and necessitates articulation. And, finally, both of these exchanges involve noteworthy silences that I helped to create—silences that unsettle me now and that prompt me to explore why they occurred. As Glenn suggests, "[l]ike the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that" (4), especially because of expectations that Westerners have of conversation. As Glenn explains, "Ideally, there should be no gaps and no overlaps, no competition for speaking, no worries about silences" (6). And in the instances I describe, there were noteworthy gaps—unexpected by me because I see myself as someone who is capable of talking about faith effectively, but perhaps not quite so well when I'm at work as a WPA at a secular institution. Too much may well be on the line in the back of my mind to have an open dialogue about faith.

According to Glenn, "unexpected silences unsettle us, often making us anxious about the specific meaning"—even when these unexpected silences are our own (11). And the unexpected silences I crafted unsettle me because I think they supplanted important albeit non-existent utterances and because they manifested to maintain or regain some degree of comfort for me instead of social justice for the believer under scrutiny. In the first exchange I mention, I worry that my silence indicated a tacit agreement that religious believers in the academy are a problem and that secularism or atheism are somehow preferable to belief. And I worry that my silence suggested that I see faith and homosexuality as incompatible when they're potentially compatible without problems that organized religion creates. In the second exchange I mention, I worry that my silence allowed the older white woman's interpretation of the alumnus of color's sense of his beliefs to cover over his own articulation of his own faith. I worry that I should have helped to make space for that alumnus to speak when someone else talked over his identity. And then, of course, when I think about what I might have said but didn't say, I think that maybe it wasn't my place to speak after all. But then I find myself back in the midst of the memory of the silence that unsettled me in the first place. I find myself pondering the power dynamics in these situations and considering Glenn's observation that "[j]ust like speech, silence can deploy power; it can defer power. It all depends" (15).

Years later, I still have no clear sense of what should have happened, what if anything I should have done differently. I have no clear sense of how to talk about faith at work when the conversation gets personal, and it's arguably always personal. But what feels clear to me is that many academics—even those like me who study faith—feel cautious in moments such as these when the subject arises. Academic believers of different kinds perhaps, too, view faith as unprofessional even though there never exists a way to check identity or some aspect of identity at the door of the academy. This sense of faith as unprofessional—the sense that to be professional or polite, one ought not talk about religion—is perhaps most prevalent at public institutions even though most Americans are believers of some kind. Indeed, eighty-seven percent of respondents to the Gallup International Millennium Survey identified themselves as "followers of some religion" and nearly two-thirds viewed God as "very important" in their personal lives (Carballo).

What feels clear to me, too, is that conversations about faith—especially those that happen among believers of different kinds—are important to have, even though I, like others, clearly have yet to master the art of having them across rhetorical situations. I have now, however, at least *started* the thorny process of having them in my role as a WPA. I now talk with one colleague who continually contemplates leaving the profession for a life of service that more directly involves her Catholic faith. She tells me there are few academics with whom she can talk about her situation, and so our conversations remain in the metaphorical

closet that email through our personal email accounts provides to protect her privacy. Likewise, I have talked with a former colleague about how he lost his job for criticism over a mention he made in his academic book about his belief in God. Most notably, however, I appreciate a conversation I had with two colleagues of different faiths—one a Protestant and the other a Muslim—about how faith motivates us in our work. And finding a place for faith at work in the academic, writing-centered workplace is at the heart of what I'm writing about here. Certainly, there exists the faith among Catholics that personal goodness comes from work as opposed to faith alone. And Protestants, too, have a work ethic that distinguishes them despite the fact that they historically distinguished themselves through the doctrine of *sole fides*. This Protestant work ethic gives shape to the American Dream that immigrants to the U.S. in particular idealize. Finally, Muslims see faith as a motivation for good work as well, especially if they focus on work as it leads to adherence to the third pillar of faith, *zakat*, which involves sharing the fruits of one's labor with those in need.

Certainly, there exist anxieties involving belief and there exist stories involving lost jobs that show that faith is always already political and not solely personal. Faith is polarizing as it intersects with other features of our identities and because of our tacit or overt sense of that reality, we perhaps prefer silence to talking about faith. But by finding ways to move beyond the kinds of silences that I have described here, by finding ways to engage in dialogue about belief or interfaith dialogue, we might find other commonalities among believers and nonbelievers of different kinds. And surely we'll find rifts as well—the sorts of impasses that Crowley discusses. But we'll not know what we might find if we continue to say nothing.

Bag-lady Storytelling of Faith and Religion in the Writing Center

Recently, staff in my writing center have been interrogating the terms "safe space" and "brave space" when discussing our work, particularly in identity politics and intersectional work. While my staff and I (Anna) have had productive conversations on gender and sexuality, and we're slowly starting to have critical conversations on race, I have found that discussions on religion and faith have led to unproductive outbursts and silences of the sort Lila explores. In sessions with writers, I, too, have witnessed a lack of dialogue in discussing religion: this is what my faith dictates, this is how I respond. In my own personal and complicated relationship with faith, as a Catholic and a feminist, I find my inability to talk about why I choose to remain a Catholic, despite my deep misgivings with the Catholic Church, to be problematic. Similar to my own hesitation with terms like "brave space," I cannot seem to simply say "I'm a Catholic" and "I'm a feminist." Both labels sound wrong and uncomplicated, both lead to a reductive way of thinking. In my work as a writing center director and as a feminist scholar (and again, I'm finding it difficult to separate the two labels), I find myself returning to Crowley's *Toward a Civil Discourse* and Donna Harraway's concept of "bag-lady storytelling." To me, these works written by women interested in real dialogue refuse to fall into the binary trap and rather ask us to complicate our understandings of the world in which we live. Crowley, in her once again very timely work on religious fundamentalism, asks us to return to rhetoric in our conversations about religion: "Well-prepared rhetors can find openings that can help participants to conceive of themselves and their relations to events in new ways. To my mind this is at the very least an improvement over the current ideological impasse, to which Americans typically respond with anger or silence" (23). These works help me in thinking about faith and religion and ways they intersect with the writing center, with my work, with my personal life. In keeping with Harraway, I proceed to tell two stories on religion and faith in the writing center and explore ways these experiences can turn to productive dialogue through the work of these scholars.

I earned my doctorate at a Catholic institution and spent most of my time in the writing center. Consultants often came to me when they had difficult experiences in the center. One particular consultant came to me frequently, and we grew close. In many ways, we were similar: both of us grew up Catholic, white and middle class, always questioning certain values and traditions that were forced on us, and later on, found solace in feminist readings and scholarship as we sought to navigate ourselves in this world. Interestingly enough, as I reflect on this memory and my friendship with this consultant, we never discussed how the two different aspects of our identities intersected (if they ever did) or our own reconciliations with the two, often conflicting, ideologies. However, this consultant approached me one afternoon to discuss a difficult conversation she had not with a writer but with a colleague, a peer. In this conversation, she told me, she felt attacked for her Catholicism by her fellow tutor, and worse, she felt "dumb," as she couldn't adequately justify her own positioning, and agreed with the tutor's critique of the Catholic Church. They were discussing the March for Life event that our

school was promoting, both having problems with this march and the way the institution was framing a "pro-life" movement, yet this conversation then grew larger, more unwieldy, as conversations do, and the two began arguing over Catholicism in general. The tutor with whom she was fighting defined himself as a "cultural Jew" and had some very difficult experiences being a student in a Vincentian Catholic institution. The young woman did not know how she could both affirm the experiences that her tutor (and friend) experienced as a Jewish member of a relatively conservative Catholic institution while "defending" (her word) her faith. What I should have done—what I wished I had done—was use this moment to build on a difficult but necessary conversation with the staff on faith in the writing center. This was an opportunity to explore with the tutors what it means to work in a conservative Catholic institution and the daily negotiations and even sufferings we all experienced because of religion and faith.

What I did instead: I resorted to the still dominant trope of "academic neutrality" and focused more on the importance of building a community in the center, despite differences, and the importance of professional discourse during these moments. What would happen if nearby writers, waiting for their tutors, heard this religious debate? Did this debate appropriately reflect our work as tutors, did religion have a space in our academic setting? In my concern with making the writing center a "safe space" for all, I cut off this dialogue in fear of offending. And I did it all too easily, as I advocated for having difficult conversations in the center on gender and race, and I think this was because the topic was religion and faith.

Flash forward to my current position: I am now a director of a large writing center at a public university in rural Oklahoma. Although I work at a public institution, I have found faith and religion to be perhaps even more dominant in this space than they ever were at my Catholic institution. Faculty orientation emphasized how important faith is in our students' lives, and that we should be wary of certain conversations and behaviors that can easily offend students. Similar to my Catholic upbringing, the emphasis on the female's body is all too present in conversations about classroom management. Students here might be more quick to be upset about the way a professor dresses—to think about what it means to look professional in the classroom. During our orientation, the facilitator made a joke about cleavage.

In the writing center, I find solace in the conversations we have: we celebrate pushing back on narratives of professionalism and academic neutrality. We advocate for linguistic diversity, for antiracist pedagogy, for feminism in the writing center. In a conservative public institution, in which a more conservative Christian and often Evangelical rhetoric dominates, the writing center can be seen as a "brave space." Trump was elected president my first year and we mourned. During a staff meeting shortly after, we discussed microagressions in the writing center. An undergraduate consultant, our one very conservative and Christian tutor, proclaimed at a staff meeting that he had recently been reading more scholarship on writing center work and that he finds the scholarship to be anti-Christian, anti-white male. A graduate student, in response to this claim, immediately shouted, "Fuck Donald Trump!" In attempts to create a brave space, I facilitated a dialogue on why the undergraduate's statement was problematic and racist; on how simplistic his reading of the scholarship was and the ways in which we live in a white, heterosexist, capitalist and patriarchal culture. These are all things that I absolutely believe in and the staff chimed in beautifully in response to this one, lone consultant. He was silenced in the conversation.

In reflection, I am not happy with my response to the student. In my attempt to make the writing center a site of activism and socially just thinking, I refused to allow for openings and disagreements from consultants with differing viewpoints and instead created a space in which intimidation and incivility dominated (Crowley). In what ways did I fall into a binary logic of guilt/blame as I so desperately (and earnestly) tried to create a "brave space"? In what ways did I refuse to understand how this young man, a Christian who grew up in rural Oklahoma, surrounded by people who have felt neglected by the government for many years, might respond to the work that we're trying to do? In what ways did I solely judge his intent—which I still find to be wrong—and not the historically situated discourse that undoubtedly swirls around his head. And in what ways did my action only create more accusation and defensiveness—creating a status quo of "us versus them." Again, what if I were, instead, to draw on the work of Crowley and use them in an attempt to create a productive dialogue, one of true understanding. In this particular context, religion would be an appropriate starting place to discuss identity and intersectionality in our work, and yet was neglectful of, as I refused to see anything productive coming from the conservative evangelical rhetoric that was oppressing to me, in so many ways.

These two experiences, and revisiting and reflecting on work done by Crowley, bring me to where I am now and my interest in religion and faith in writing center professional / WPA work. As I continue to try and resist the real temptation of binary thinking

and easy labels to latch on to, I realize I put forth no clear, linear argument in this retelling of my stories on faith and its intersections with writing center work. Rather, I ask that we—as writing center professionals, WPAs, and scholars—start reflecting more and allow for stories and experiences to create an ongoing dialogue that is not happening in our field, not happening in our society. If we are to allow ourselves to talk openly, perhaps we will begin seeing why and how we continue to separate religion and faith from our work in the academy. Too often, I find, do religion and faith become dominated by white men, both in society and in the field of writing studies,[5] creating narratives out of religion and faith for others. If we're to accept that religions have commonalities, we can certainly see that good will and love are the dominating ideas, and perhaps it is not religion or faith that is problematic but the way that they have been read and narrated for us. This turns me again to a woman scholar (and queer feminist thinker), Donna Harraway, and her work on bag-lady storytelling. According to Harraway, bag-lady storytelling puts "unexpected partners and irreducible details into a frayed, porous carrier bag" (160). And as Harraway continues, "The stories do not have beginnings or ends; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations—just the kind of survivable stories we need these days" (160). If we are to attempt to create a more socially just future, and incorporate this work in our writing spaces, we need to begin reformulating the powerful narratives that are so dominant in our everyday discourses. Religion is one extremely powerful discourse and it has, for far too long, been removed from work focused on identity and intersectionality. As Crowley writes, "arguments from complexity or nuance suggest only that those who make them are confused" (147). And as she continues, "In ethical terms a refusal of ambiguity and complexity allows no space for negotiation, no way to generate alternatives or gradations" (147). Rather than reduce our work to labels and names that create simplistic thinking, let us turn to Harraway's call for stories without beginning or ends. To complicate this call for stories, Crowley discusses the problems with single-mindedness, particularly in religious rhetoric and how it privileges hegemonic structures: "the single-mindedness that accrues to isolation and privilege" (194). As she continues, "those of us who want change should challenge privilege and isolation in whatever ways we can find or invent" (194). To challenge the privileging of religious rhetoric, let's put works we normally wouldn't put together in conversation with one another. Instead of creating *straightforward* arguments from *rational thinking*, let's complicate our arguments as we interrogate our everyday interactions with the world and discourses that dominate our world. Faith and religion can help us inform our work in more meaningful ways if we allow ourselves to be in spaces that might not have names or narratives; in fact, a critical examination of faith and religion could just let us get to that place.

Revisionary Rhetorics and Writing Center Administration

Anna's turn to Harraway's call for stories that contain "continuations, interruptions, and reformulations" is an apt response to the silences that Lila reflects on in her writing center experiences. In Julie Jung's terms from her work *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*, Anna and Lila enact the kinds of listening and reflection that "attend to the silences" of their spaces (34). In her discussion of revisionary rhetorics, Jung identifies two rhetorical strategies—metadiscursive commentary and intertextuality—"that enable rhetors to give form to paradox as their writing both makes itself heard as it listens" (30). Extending these rhetorical moves beyond written texts, revisionary rhetors employ metadiscursive commentary and intertextuality to communicate their purpose, while creating spaces to listen and invite their audience's response. Jung's foundation for her theorizing of revisionary rhetorics is that knowledge is partial within any rhetorical situation: "By marking their texts as partial versions of some unknowable and revisable whole, revisionary rhetors create gaps that invite readers to speak back" (30). Jung's theory of revisionary rhetorics is useful when we consider tutor-talk, specifically in terms of tutors' communication with writing center administrators. In Jung's terms, revisionary rhetors "sustain revision by situating meaning within layered and multiple contexts" (33). Writing center administrators, particularly in terms of negotiating religious identity, engage in such revisionary practices in many rhetorical situations involving tutors and colleagues. Indeed, Lila, Anna, and I (Andrea) in all of our writing center experiences, reflect such repositioning of our own sense of our audiences and ourselves in our centers, offices, and larger institutions.

I use Jung's notion of revisionary rhetorics to read interactions I had with one tutor over the period of a semester. These conversations reflect metadiscursive commentary and intertextuality to reveal some of the work I, one writing center administrator, did with one tutor, whom I identify as R., enacting revisionary rhetorics together. While revisionary rhetorics serve as a useful lens in any writing center, religious identity is particularly relevant within the following interactions

because of the Modern Jewish Orthodox institutional context where these interactions took place. I documented my conversations with R. during the semester when I was finishing my own graduate coursework and moving toward writing my dissertation proposal. At that time, I was the associate director of a writing center at the all-women's undergraduate campus of a Jewish university in New York City. The university's two single-sex, undergraduate campuses are distinctly influenced by the institution's Modern Jewish Orthodox mission statement. As an Eastern Orthodox Christian woman working in a Jewish Orthodox women's space, I spent eight years of my daily work life working alongside undergraduate women whose beliefs differed from my own and who also taught me how intimately religion, gender, and education are related within their institutional and religious traditions. These early years in my own WPA career offered me a framework for studying institutional mission—particularly in a religiously-driven institution—and its role in rhetorical education, which I ultimately documented using qualitative research methods for my dissertation. The interactions I document here are taken from my personal notes leading up to my dissertation research on writing center tutors' civic engagement; these are samples of only a few conversations I ended up coming back to with R., who was one participant in later research. I return to these interactions here to read through the lens of revisionary rhetorical theory.

Tutors and WPAs employ metadiscursive commentary often in their interactions with each other. Understanding my interactions with R. through the lens of metadiscursive commentary demonstrates an example of a silence that invited me into R.'s story of negotiating her religious identity. One afternoon, R. came into my office toward the end of her writing center shift and asked me how she was supposed to teach a Jewish text that she fundamentally does not agree with or cannot take an acceptable position on. While I am not a Jewish Studies scholar, I am influenced by Lauren Fitzgerald's work connecting Jewish religious education to the kinds of collaborative practices familiar in writing centers; yet much of what I know about Orthodox Judaism I learned as a sort of apprentice to the observant Jewish tutors within this discourse community, and with whom I worked during my years as a WPA at the Beren Writing Center.[6] As a non-Jewish person working in a predominantly Jewish space, I asked R. for an example of what an "acceptable" position might be, but she didn't quite answer that question. Instead, she responded by projecting ahead, after graduation, envisioning herself in her anticipated career as a Jewish educator: "When I teach in a [Jewish] day school, I know I'm going to be asked to teach things that I find controversial." She told me that certain opinions she had would be frowned upon in the Orthodox community, especially coming from a teacher in an Orthodox Jewish day school. I asked what she considered controversial, and after a long pause, said, "ummm, it's hard to think of a specific example."

Capturing this brief moment of conversation on its own may represent the kinds of talk that many administrators have with tutors nearing graduation and thinking about their careers beyond the writing center, but this moment lingered with me for what I felt R. and I left unsaid. Once our conversation ended, I had the sense that there was much more here that R. could have shared but didn't. This clearly subjective feeling led me to consider my own silence, quieting the voice in me that said R. is *progressive,* that she was identifying a kind of *conservative* strand in Jewish Orthodox thinking. I recognized that I defaulted to these binaries—progressive and conservative—that always failed in forwarding my thinking as a writing center administrator, and failed even more glaringly at a single-sex, religious campus. This voice in my head—the negotiation between what I thought I knew about identity categories and the awareness that those categories are partial, misinformed, even flawed—is an example of the kind of metadiscursive commentary that Jung encourages in her writing classrooms. A revisionary rhetor's authority is predicated on accepting that knowledge is partial. Revisionary rhetors' texts—and here I take "text" to mean any tutor-talk—invites audience perspective, deliberately making space for the listener to *hear* the rhetor, but also to bring the listener's own experience into the rhetorical situation.

In Jung's terms, metadiscursive commentary is closely related to intertextuality as a tenet of revisionary rhetorics. While literature scholars are no strangers to intertextuality, this idea may seem out of place in theorizing writing center interactions. Yet my time working as a WPA at a writing center on a religious campus demonstrates that intertextuality offers a productive way to understand tutor-talk. In her downtime between tutoring sessions later that semester, R. and I started talking about the reading lists I had begun compiling for my dissertation proposal. I had been thinking about how gender and religion intersect in the space of the writing center, and I asked R. to teach me about the tradition of married women in Jewish Orthodoxy covering their hair. She told me a story from a religious text about a married woman who had been accused of adultery—"*only accused, not found guilty of, adultery*," *R. emphasized*—and who was walking through the marketplace with her hair uncovered.

According to R., and to my potentially flawed memory, it is from this story that some rabbinical commentators derive the Jewish law for women covering their hair once they are married; for in an effort not to fall into the category of adulteress, women began covering their hair. R. also noted that there is a notion in Orthodoxy that a married woman's natural hair is considered "naked," therefore only permissible to be seen by that woman's husband. While R. doesn't *revise* religious text to explain the Jewish Orthodox practice of a woman covering her hair, she (or perhaps we) invited religious texts into the space of the writing center. This may seem like a superficial way to think about intertextuality; however, the real intertextual moment here is in how this interaction between R. and me invites "juxtaposing [one text] with other kinds of contingent texts" (Jung 31). R.'s own experience covering her hair as a married Jewish woman both deviates from and intersects with my experience, as a married Christian woman, learning about a cultural tradition that is not my own. Our individual narratives were both divergent and parallel. To consider talk in the center in terms of generating narrative oral texts—such as the those R. and I shared—we can understand tutors and WPAs as revisionary rhetors.

Perhaps the most relevant contribution revisionary rhetorics can have for writing center administrators and writing centers in general is to highlight the ways in which our work involves disruption. After R. offered me a textual explanation of why women in Jewish Orthodoxy cover their hair, I told her that I couldn't help but think that these traditions uphold a system where men dictate the constraints by which women live. She smiled, laughed a little, and said, "Andrea, it's a patriarchal religion, we've got to get over that." She then reinforced an idea that she had mentioned to me many times before and would come back in later interviews as a participant in my dissertation research: that upholding her commitment to community is at the core of her religious practice. R. explained that she constantly made choices in her daily life to maintain some traditions and push back against others. As a revisionary rhetor, R. disrupted my reading of her religious tradition, one that motivated me to insist on a gendered way of reading when she herself was reading communally, and constantly negotiating and blurring gender categories that I was viewing as static. These disruptions create or strengthen relationships, and disrupting hierarchical binaries—tutor / admin, teacher / student, private / public—is one of the hallmarks of writing center work and of revisionary rhetorical strategies.

In *Toward a Civil Discourse*, Crowley reminds us that "the practice of rhetoric continues apace whether or not scholars and theorists pay any attention to it and whether or not practitioners know that they are, indeed, engaging in rhetoric" (28). To be sure, writing center tutors and administrators are constantly engaging in rhetoric, developing our own agentic tools and refining ways of responding to each other across difference and shared identity, whether or not we realize it on a daily basis. As a rhetorical space, one that is constantly alive with diverse rhetors, exigencies, constraints, and identities, writing centers are well positioned to counterfundamentalist work, even as we may be invited into seemingly fundamentalist frameworks. Jung's rhetorical strategies offered me a lens to identify the way my own thinking had been influenced by a particular fundamentalism, one that made me default towards binary categories, but also helped me think beyond such categories, developing dialogue with one tutor, and with myself, that I continue to aspire toward.

Beyond Conclusions: Implications for Future Conversations about Faith

We as the authors of this essay produce close readings of unsettling situations in our writing center work to reflect on what silence and talk about religion might mean. We reflect on binary ways of thinking that inform conversations about religion in America, for instance the conservative/progressive binary as it manifests in conversations about the opposition of Catholicism with feminism or traditional Judaism with feminism. And we try to create through our scholarship the sort of brave space that Anna mentions in her narrative—a space that necessitates non-binarizing, open-minded, and nonliteralist ways of reading writing-centered experiences: counterfundamentalist methodologies that open dialogue among fundamentalists and believers and nonbelievers of all kinds and that thereby respond to Vander Lei and Fitzgerald's call for engaging "the conflicts that come with addressing religious belief in writing programs" (192). We must embrace that there is no one easy or right way to read an experience, dialogue, or silence involving faith in writing center work. Instead, the nuances of these experiences and the changing feelings that these experiences produce point to the value of having changing perspectives. There is value in understanding writing centers as spaces that call for trust (and allowances for silence, storytelling, and revisions) in the face of uncertainty and there is value in having unanswered questions that can lead to productive dialogue and understanding about religious and secular Others to ourselves.

The unanswered questions with which we started this project—about the role that religion plays in tutor education, writing spaces, and conversations about writing—led us to share our stories and experiences involving faith. Although we knew when we began talking and writing that religion informed our work despite our different institutions, we learned a great deal from conversation and from writing. We learned about our own identities and we began wondering about how being white, Christian-affiliated women affected our own understandings of religion in the center and perhaps even played a role in silencing us. In the stories we share in this work, we explore our own positionalities and embrace disruptions. And we hope that readers will take away from this article the need to have more open dialogue with staff on religious identity because religious rhetoric always finds a way into our centers, no matter how secular the space or its inhabitants may seem. Indeed, as Crowley suggests, religious rhetoric is at the center of our conversations on civic-mindedness and democracy. And we are currently living in uncertain times in which some staunchly fundamentalist rhetorical approaches—approaches that inhibit dialogue across difference because they seek to erase difference—may stifle democracy and civic-mindedness.

Moreover, democracy and civic-mindedness exist as possibly unattainable ends that we strive toward through thorny processes, and we suggest here that these thorny processes are perhaps more valuable than polished end results might ever be. They involve strategic engagement with rhetorical approaches and rhetorical thinking. They involve, as we frame them, attention to the rhetoric of silence, the rhetoric of bag-lady storytelling, and revisionary rhetoric—rhetorics that invite metadiscursive dialogues that prime audiences to listen to layers of meaning in dialogue. According to Jung, revisionary rhetorics rely on teaching and revising through the use of multigenre texts—texts that speak to the kind of work that our voices together produced here and that voices in conversation with one another in general have the capacity to produce. Whereas our individual sections are not written in different genres per se, taken together, they create a multivocal picture of religious faith in the writing center. They add layers of context and meaning about religious identity in writing centers and writing program administration. And they perform the kind of metadiscursitvity that revisionary rhetorics enact by attending not only to the silences in our local contexts but to the silences and disruptions between each other's work. Ultimately, in offering a picture of this multivocal reality, we deliberately opt against offering singular prescriptions for staff education on faith. Those would mirror the sort of narrow thinking that fundamentalism produces to unproductive ends. Instead, we hope our readers see the different stories we put forth and the theories we come into conversation with as a useful method and as just a beginning to a much-needed dialogue. In turn, of course, we hope our readers join into multivocal interfaith dialogue about faith in the writing center to see how these conversations can develop in our writing centers and programs.

Notes

1. A 2014 Pew Research Center Survey finds that US "Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines . . . than at any point in the last two decades" ("Political Polarization in the American Public").
2. There is extensive scholarship on religion and writing studies by scholars such as Jeffrey Ringer, Paul Lynch, Michael de Palma. Also, Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe have written on women and religious rhetoric.
3. We are aware of the criticisms *Toward A Civil Discourse* received and find Beth Daniell's "Whetstones Provided by the World: Trying to Deal with Difference in a Pluralistic Society" and David Timmerman's review of her work to be particularly compelling in pointing out Crowley's problematic use of terms and how it promotes a binary way of thinking and talking about religion.
4. See Harvey Graff's *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* for a discussion of the secularization of literacy practices that are part and parcel of higher education.
5. I agree with Helen Sterk who in "Faith, Feminism, and Scholarship: *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 1999-2009," claims more work needs to be done on faith, feminism, and intersectional work. This is specifically important and somewhat lacking in writing program/center scholarship.
6. Much of our field's work understands religion exclusively within Christian traditions even though some scholarship has expanded writing studies' consideration of religious identity to include Jewish rhetorical traditions, e.g. Andrea Greenbaum and Deborah Holdstein's *Judaic Perspectives in Rhetoric and Composition* and the Special Issue of *College English*, vol. 72, no. 6 (2010), dedicated to Jewish rhetorics.

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